

All right. Rose, will you please continue?

A whole night long, sometimes, we marched to get bread. And we couldn't get it. And we'd come home empty, and hungry, and wet. And one time, many times, where we stayed was like a hill. And it was very deep. Being I was afraid to go near the grave. So my father says, we will cut through the woods.

And it's like a very steep-- I mean, like a wall, a hill down, and then on the bottom, you know? So 99 times of 100, we just laid down. And we tumbled till we come down to the bottom. When we come down to the bottom, we had to go up to the next hill. And then we were not far away from the house.

So we knew already not-- to save miseries, because I was very frightened-- not to go near the grave. And so we went the other way. And that's how we tried to make it, every day, count.

And my father used to say, children, maybe a other month, maybe a other year, you hear, he says, the Russians are already there. And maybe, someday, we'll touch them. And that was something unbelievable. They didn't even shoot or anything like that. They just decided, with the boats, to go over the water. And that's it.

During all the time that you were in hiding, did you have any sense of time, of how time was passing?

Yes, we had-- since time-- I just told the lady. In that hall, we had one block, a little block taken out so we can see when it's daytime and when it's nighttime. You see, in that-- at nighttime, usually, when the kids went to sleep, he brought food for us, whatever-- excuse me-- fall off of his mouth was for us.

Many times, we had to fight with the dog. Because we were really hungry. We were young, and we were hungry. So if they give scraps for the dog, so who can grab it faster, me or the dog? So that's how we would eat, or the peels from potatoes.

So it was really.

That was delicious.

You're really surviving at the most basic level.

After we were freed, the doctor said if we would be one more month in hiding, nobody from us would survive. Because we didn't have no protein, no vitamins, nothing in our bodies. But on my legs, after I come out and we start getting halfway normal, I used to get blisters this big, filled up with water. And they were burning something fierce. And the doctor says because no vitamins in the body, no nourishment, nothing.

Because we were so hungry, the only wish was we should survive and, one day, we should not be hungry. Our stomachs shouldn't growl, that when we will lay down, we can fall asleep not hungry. Do you know your stomach keeps cooking, and cooking, and cooking and being so starving hungry that you can't fall asleep? And you don't even have water to drink. We were limited with everything.

Were you dehydrated and everything?

Yeah, we only could have-- when she brought down that food, she brought a jar of water, a little bit of water, and that was it. I was a little bit better off, or my brother, because we went with our father. And when we come to one of the people, what they call themselves friends-- who weren't-- particularly, the one would want to marry me off to her son. So he always used to come out with a big jar of milk. And he says, drink as many as you want.

He always bring me a piece of bread with cheese. Come on, eat it now. Later, you take home the rest. But this is for you. So as long-- and then my brother-- it got to a point that my brother couldn't go so many times because his legs were growing together, his hips. So most of the time, when the Germans were stationed already, period, over there-- so most

of it, I was the one who was going.

And I had to go daylight because nighttime, if they catch anybody, they kill you on the spot. They don't ask you if you are a woman or you are a man. You are shot at because that's where that war-- how you called it? The place what you call war--

War zone?

War zone. There was all the ammunition, all the artillery, all that stuff we're standing around. So if to go, I had to go daytime. So I put on the babushka and a red cotton dress-- filthy-- with the rags on my feet. And the Germans used to pass by. And they used to laugh. He says, look at this. That's how the Poles look. And I say, as long as they don't bother me, I am OK.

And I went. And sometimes, I was successful. Sometimes, I was not successful. But the last couple of months was very difficult, very difficult to survive. And you hear, here was one shot. Here, they took another one. This one is in jail. And it was a small town. Everybody knows everybody.

And this one is no more life. And this one is killed. This one, they squeeze the hand in before with the door because he want to run out. So they caught the door in the hand. And they slammed it and cut off his fingers.

All those horrors, what they were telling, it was un-- a human brain-- and I had a small brain. I couldn't observe it. How in the world-- and then I always used to say, if they will catch me, they have to kill me on the spot. Because they will not punish me. Because I knew the taste, how the Germans do.

Because one time, when he shoved his big foot in my face and I was all black. And the other time, the police, when they caught me, when I wanted to give my father water, when he run over, and beat me up, and chained me right up, he says, you are dangerous. Can you picture me dangerous? But that's the way it looked.

Or my mother had to go to bring in the wood to the jail. Because if I would go, I might run away. And in my heart-- I had in my mind, if I run away and they kill me instantly, that would be a blessing. I'm one mouth less to feed. It was horrible. And the hunger, and the filth, it was-- that's when I promised myself. If I ever come out of it alive, and if I have the money, whatever the best food in the whole wide world, I will buy. And I will eat it.

What kind of food did you live on?

Mainly potatoes. If we could get a potato, it was good. And when we had one little piece of bread this big. And my brother used to sit. And my father says, well, it's already almost 12 o'clock. Should I give the kids a bite of bread? And my brother says, we eating already? Like one says, I hope I didn't miss it.

The potatoes, who cooked it? The women upstairs?

The women upstairs. First, they ate. They ate food. Whatever was leftover, she brought it down. And like I said with the pig ear, when she brought down the food-- so my father took the plate. And he looked. And he looked at my mother. And he says, you take care of it.

So my little brother used to get a portion. In one bite, the portion was gone. Then I got a portion. And my poor father was the last one for the portion, whatever was left over. And God forbid, to throw out this piece? You're kidding. The whole plate was licked three times, not even a tiny scrap on it. Because we were hungry. We were starving-- never mind hungry, starving.

And in the fields, summertime, we could steal. But we were afraid to steal because if we pull out the potatoes to bring it home, or the corn in the corn fields, or whatever, then they will find out. And they will stand guard. And we have to pass that road. And they will catch us. And we are dead as it is, no problem there. So we would be finished.

Was the mass grave ever marked?

No. One from our home town-- I think by five years ago, I'm not sure. I think five or six years ago, he just started turning 60. And he says, he wants to go and take his wife and his daughter to that town. And he took a lot of-- he was like--

Yeah, your outside glasses

Right. And he is going to Poland. And he will show his daughter where he survived, where he was born. Because the house where he was born was still standing. And he will show who give bread and who didn't.

He will go to the cemetery where his father, and grandparents, and all the family, and say Kaddish over there. And he will go to the mass grave because his grandmother and two aunts and were in that mass grave, all the people. And he will say Kaddish on that grave. In light yahrzeit glasses.

And the airport in Warsaw-- one summer, when he get off, he went, and he took those lights. And when he come to Warsaw, they give him such a hard time. They were digging into all those cans, what he brought, and what he's hiding, and where he is going, and why for interrogation, for maybe five hours.

After the five hours, he went to Warsaw, to a hotel where he arranged it before. I guess he was overweight, and he was very upset. And he got a heart attack and died right there. And then they had the hardest time bringing back the body to America. He never went to the cemetery or anything like that.

And now my husband tries to say, why would you want to go? I go with you. I say Kaddish. You see where my hometown, your hometown. Let's do it. I says, nope. I don't want no part of Poland because two Jews went back. They wanted to sell their property. In our hometown, they killed them.

After the war was over.

After the war. And we ran away and never went back. Never, I mean never. This is it. I said, why would I want to go back? For what? We sent plenty packages to the two people who had give us, really, a helping hand with a thank you. We had a lot of land.

My father signed it all over. The house, where it was standing with all the tiles, that was very expensive. For them, it was a fortune. With the roof, with all the furniture, he give them and them.

And he said to him, all this stuff, what you have, you keep it. To the other one, he says, you go to that lady who wanted to send the police for my daughter. And here's the list, the men. She should give you all the thing. Here, you have my signature. You take care of it.

And he did. He took out from her whatever he could. And that's it. And the people from [? Å»uraw, ?] where we were picked up to take us to jail, that house-- he said, before I die, I have to burn it down. I don't know if he did or he didn't. But that lady-- would you believe, just for the clothes, what we were wearing, she was willing to sacrifice four lives?

And then when we come to the police, they searched us. Women, not women, they kept searching us all over. And then they didn't put us in the first floor, in that jail, because we might run away, on the second floor. And we had to run, let ourselves down, and run away, stay over there over the two nights, and then go back, marching back all the way to the same place where we were before.

But every town in the whole neighborhood, they all knew. They announced it in every church, in every police that this family got caught. And they're supposed to be killed. Do you believe that?

So when you were freed, where did you go after that?

After we were freed, we went to-- we were in Pilzno by a cousin, a second cousin of ours. We stayed there because we couldn't stay by us in the house. And we didn't stay there long. We left from over there. And we went to Bytom, Bytom Schlesien. And from there, we stayed there maybe a year.

And then we left. And we went through Czechoslovakia, Austria, to American zone. Because we found out that my mother has-- in America, she had a brother and a sister. And they want us to come to America. That's where we are now. And thank God. We are in the best country in the whole wide world.

You had nothing? Or what did you have when you left? Because--

Nothing, bare. We didn't even have clothes, OK? But we still had stuff like clothing, what we give away to the Poles to hold for us. So my father was nobody's fool. So he went to his personal friend, what we survived from over there.

And he says, you know, I have just rags. I left two suits by you. I have shirts, I have underwear. I don't ask for a lot, just one change of clothes. I should not be so filthy looking, he says. And then I will take care of myself. I will find out what to do with myself, and for my wife, something to put on.

And my brother couldn't walk. My brother couldn't walk at all. Because most of the time, to the end, it was really dangerous. And he started hopping because his hips were growing together. So it was very difficult for him. So most of the time, he was sitting inside.

And when I went, when we were freed and we didn't have our favorite house-- oh, other story I forgot to tell you. To the end, almost, there was no more food. And nobody wants to give us any materials out or whatever.

So my father said, near the house, by the steps, he left, in a bottle, my mother's jewelry-- the engagement ring, all the jewelry, and some money in a bottle right by the steps. If he only could get near the house, he would take that out, and we would sell it, and we would have some money for food.

So I said to my father, one night, when it's dark, we will go. And the house was on a flat land. We went, and we had a dog. That dog was my favorite dog. I could do to that dog anything and everything. He never touched me.

And as I was approaching the house, I was coming first. And he put them on a chain, on a long wire and on a chain. And he was running forward and back because we had a garden with fruits and vegetables. So he let him run to watch the fruits, I guess.

And I said, Lord, I said, shh. And I says, "Lord." He said, [PANTING] like you've never seen, with both hands on my shoulders. If you ever in your lifetime see how that dog was licking me, and licking me-- like one says, you come back, you come back, oh my god!

And then my father took out that stuff, what was there. And we left. He followed me to the end. And then I turned around, and I said, "Lord, shh." And he stood there. [PANTING] This was unreal.

I forgot to tell you. When we were leaving the town-- I don't know. We were not there. But we had a cat. We had that dog. And we had a cow. The cow, we give from the town to that-- whatever this, that man. He took our cow. And that dog and the cat was around our feet, crying like human beings. This, you never heard in your life.

And the cat was pregnant. And as the Gestapo car, the last car, left-- so first, it go slow. When it started out going faster, that cat, full speed, went and threw itself under the wheels.

They stopped the car. And they pushed the cat away, not to be killed. They start again driving fast. That cat ran, and went under the car, and got killed. It didn't want to live. Would you believe that?

And that dog, after so many months, so many weeks, recognized me, not a sound. That's why that men who had lived in that house says, I cannot understand. I didn't even hear one bark. Somebody must have known.

And then when I told the story to the men, we stayed there, he says, oh, yeah, a dog will sniff you. And he will know exactly who you are. Because if anybody else would come near the house, he would tear you to pieces. But he still remembered. And they killed that dog.

After the war, when they ran away, when we come to the burned house, the burned house didn't bother me. But when that dog lied with that bullet, I took that dog. And he was stiff, frozen because it was winter. It was so cold.

I cried. And I hold that dog. I never forget it. And my father said, OK, we make a funeral. Where do you want the dog to lay? I said, by that famous tree when I used to play. That's where we put the dog. Would you believe? And I never forget it.

But that dog was a real friend. And he saved us. Because if we wouldn't sell, that time, that jewelry, we wouldn't-- because we couldn't go any more to other places to pick up stuff. And we had to live. If we don't supply the stuff to that man, he wouldn't hold us one day.

My father says, I'm not kidding myself. If I don't deliver it, we don't have a chance in a lifetime to survive. And this way, we are the best people. He called us my people, my survivor, my brethren.

So was it the sale of the jewelry that--

No, we got the-- he was our shoemaker. See, in Poland, you have a tailor. You have a shoemaker. You have the one who takes care of the horses, who drives you, all that stuff. So one of the shoemakers, he said to my father, if you want sometimes to sell some kind of jewelry, I have connections. So I can sell it and give you some money. And I would have a couple of dollars, too.

And that's what happened. We brought it over to that man. And for the most gorgeous diamond ring, we got a couple hundred dollars. That's it. But that time, it was surviving. It was no jewelry to care for jewelry. It's just how you survive.

Because hungry you were. If we don't have a roof over our heads, to be in the woods, you can't survive because it's so very cold that it's unbelievable. You can't do it. So you do the best you know.

And it was not an easy task. It was not an easy-- first of all, if you sleep-- one always was watching if-- God forbid, you shouldn't snore. Because if somebody passes the house, they shouldn't hear you, OK?

In the daytime, you have to sit like a mouse, really quiet, not even to move. In the nighttime, we had to go urine or whatever. So we had a pot. So quickly run out, and get rid of that, and come right into the house.

Where could you take a bed or wash up? At nighttime-- or we washed our clothes. Or we had to grind the wheat for have-- to make noodles or to very fine. So you go over and over two, three times, or for bread.

And it was not-- that's why I said, I grew up very quickly. And that spoiled little girl was no more spoiled little girl. She put her shoulders down and did the best she know how. It's very hard. That's why--

Go ahead.

That's why I say, you know, God bless America. I said, here, the children-- I see, they give one bite, a piece of bread, and they throw it away. Would you believe, till today, I never threw out a piece of bread yet? Because I was very hungry for many years.

What happened to your other grandfather, the other one who lived with you?

My mother's father?

Yes.

My mother's father lived with us. And he lived, I think, two years from '39 to '41 or '42. And then he got sick. But he died with a natural death.

So both your grandfathers died.

Both, and they are both buried at the Jewish cemetery. I don't know if this cemetery is still standing. They do not have gravestones because in the war, we couldn't put it up.

Yes.

But they are both buried and died with a normal death. And that was-- and the rest of the family, It was a very big family. In the same hometown, from wherever we were, was my mother's sister living there.

And she had three children, a husband. Then she had an other brother in the other town. My father had two brothers. That's the closest-- I mean, the closest family And the sister. Nobody survived-- nobody.

Your brother, did he receive surgery after the war?

No. You see, we had a doctor. And he says, the last thing in his life what he will do is he will make my brother walk. And he started doing exercises to separate the hip. Because the hip was growing together. So he says, with tearing it apart, he will make it work. And every time he used to do exercises to separate the hip from the leg, my brother used to scream that you could hear him to America.

And he says, I rather die instead to go back to him. And he walked on crutches. He hopped on crutches because he couldn't walk because his two hips were growing together. And it was horrible. Skinny-- I mean, the bones were not even covered with skin, OK?

And there is, from a little boy, a growing man, tall, with long legs-- enormous, long legs. And he can't swing it, can't move it. It was a sight to see. It was unreal. And slowly, and slowly, and then he said to him, step one, step two. He couldn't. It was very hard for him.

Finally, after maybe three or four months, he started moving a little bit. You see, his legs were sewed together. This hopping was easy. But just making a step, he couldn't because it was hurting very bad.

Yeah, to take two separate steps.

Probably the hip sockets.

The hips were growing together. And little by little-- you should see my brother now. God bless him. God bless him. You wouldn't tell that he had problems like that. And it was just pitiful to look. And when you come out from hiding like that, you really wanted to eat. You wanted to eat a lot. And you never filled up.

And the doctor says, be careful, you're going to get deadly sick. He says, you don't have no vitamins. Your body is a dead body. You have to start slow. How can you start slow when you are so hungry? You want to push it in more, and more, and more. And you have to be careful. And he says, no, you can't do that. Because you'll all end up dead.

Yeah, that's died in the camps.

My mother got a heart condition from it, and my father, bleeding ulcers. Oh, don't ask. It never went back to what it was, to be, really, a normal life. But thank God my brother is doing very well. And I am doing, thank God, very good.

I am healthy. And I am retired now, thank God. Somehow we managed.

And you parents?

And my parents are still with us. My parents are not doing so well. My father is 6 foot and only skin covers his bones.

How old is he?

91 and 1/2. And my mother, God bless her, is 86.

Where did they--

They married this March, the 30th. It's going to be 60 years that couple is married. Do you believe? And if you ever see somebody caring and loving each other, this is those two. He watches her, and she watches him. [SPEAKING YIDDISH] Gave him the medicine. You have to take the medicine. Come on to the table, take the medicine.

Taking care of each other, that's a blessing from heaven. Protecting her in every way and aspect, nobody, should God forbid, say anything wrong on his wife. She's the prettiest. And she is the smartest. And she is his wife. And if you see caring-- the man can't see you, OK? I talked to him on the telephone.

And he says to me, if you could see your mother put on a dress, she looks so beautiful in that dress that you don't have no idea. She said, ah, it's just a dress. She answers, just a dress. And he thinks I am pretty in the dress. Well, you answer me. Are many couples like that? I don't think so.

Not too many.

No.

I don't think, not after 60 years of being married.

That's beautiful.

Was your father able to work when he came here, or--

Well, my father was a rich merchant on other side, a very rich man. When he come to America, it was very difficult for him because I had an aunt and an uncle, but they wouldn't give a helping hand. My uncle said to my father, you go and look where it's dirty windows, and go in and ask for work.

This was his brother?

No, that was his brother-in-law, my mother's-- the sister was my mother's sister. And it was very difficult.

But they were not survivors themselves?

No, they come before. They come here before the war. They didn't know anything about it. As a matter of fact, they were ashamed of the survivors, that we were lesser people than they are.

[SIGHS]

It's true.

What did your father do? He become a sewing operator, anything to make a dollar, to be independent, and not to ask for any charity from anybody. And we make do. We lived together. We paid in a cold flat. And we survived.

How old were you when you came here?

When I come here, I was 25, I think, I was.

You were in a DP camp for a while?

Yeah, in Germany. Ulm on the Donau, I was in the DP camp.

For how long?

About a year and a half or two years because they were making out the papers to come here. And from beginning, to be honest with you, if I know what was waiting me here, I would never budge. I would go to Israel. And that's where I would remain. Because the beginning was very difficult.

We didn't have any jobs prepared for us. We didn't have any apartment. They just brought us here. And they said to us, you go and do for yourself whatever you can do. We cannot help you.

I had a very well-to-do uncle, my mother's brother in Trenton. And he said, you, I will not help. But your mother, when she comes, she has a place by me. When my mother come, she didn't have a place by him. She had a place by me. Because he says, I cannot argue with my wife. She's my wife. And I cannot help you. And so that was it. Thank God.

You know, thank God, in [PLACE NAME] I once made a dinner. And my whole family I invited because my mother had come from California. I invited them to our house. And I had, maybe, 25 or 30 people, family. And they all admired how beautiful I have the house, how the China and everything.

And inside, buckled up for a long time, that's-- my family look at me as a second citizen, you know? That's I'm not equal.

A second-class citizen.

A second-class citizen. I am not equal to their level. And there they are. And I prepared-- I worked to prepare for that evening. And they all sit, and they enjoyed the food, and they admire everything. And then my cousin, my first cousin, my aunt's daughter, says, where did you get all this beautiful stuff?

And I turned around. I says, Rose, look at this. You see those 10 fingers? With my sweat and my 10 fingers, I says. And I used my head and an honest way. All what I have is from that, I says. And I am proud it's mine.

Did you work from the time you came here?

Two jobs.

What did you do?

I sewed. I learned how to sew. My father taught me in a factory. And I worked in stores, selling weekends. And then I used to go to New York, and buy some stuff, and sell, and make a living. And I sent my daughter to college and to graduate school.

Did you come over long before your parents?

No, I come before my parents.

Yeah, how long before?

Six months.



And your brother, did he come with them?

With my parents, my brother come with my parents. I come to Boston, Massachusetts. And I was shipped-- when I come off the boat, they took me off the boat in a wheelchair. I never forget that. Because the boat was for animals, a boat, whatever-- and the waters were very rough.

A cattle boat?

A cattle boat. And I guess I couldn't take it. So they tossed me up on top of the deck. And the waters were splashing forth and back. I couldn't hold down no food through the whole time. Forget it. And I was so sick, it was unbelievable. I didn't know if I'm coming or going.

When the ship docked and they says, we already arrived, and I am laying over there, I don't care if I'm coming or going.

[LAUGHS]

More dead than alive.

So they come with a wheelchair. And they sit me in a wheelchair. And they wheeled me down to a big, huge hall. And from there, they come with emblems. You go here, you go there. And they took us to the train and shipped us on the train. Because we had to go to our uncle. That's where we supposed to go.

Did you speak any English at the time you came here?

No, no English at all.

German?

Yes, perfect-- perfect German, perfect Polish, Jewish. And that's it. And thank God. Today, I tell my story and proudly. I achieved something in this country, what I don't think anybody could be capable of doing that in Poland, no way.

Because first of all, they were very hostile. And the second of all, you wouldn't have that opportunity, what you have here. If you want to do it, they give you a chance to do it. Over there, they don't. So I am grateful for that.

You were truly a survivor in every sense.

Yeah. I lived through plenty hell. Some, I can talk about it. And some, I cannot talk about it. But it was very hard. And I tell you the truth. Now are my best years. The other day it was raining very hard outside. And I said to my husband, do you know how lucky I am? I sit inside in a dry room, and it's pouring outside. Look at that rain, I says.

And I am not-- I was wrinkled up like a 150-year-old lady, one wrinkle on top. I'd never seen my body like that, all shriveled up. I couldn't see my face, but I see in my hands, my legs-- it was all one wrinkle on top of the other-- big, deep from the water.

And there, my father's stays with his tears in his eyes. And he says to me, which way would you like to die? By a bullet or by the water? Because the water is-- I said, by a bullet. He says, OK, let's go. And you are waiting any second. They will-- there it comes. You are prepared any minute for it.

But that's life. It's hard. It's hard to talk about it. Believe me, I tried to prepare myself for days for that. And I said to myself, you have to be strong. You have to say it and not just-- [NON-ENGLISH] come out the wrong way. You must control it. And I tried.

You did. Thank you very much.

You're very welcome. This was my pleasure and my obligation.

[SIGHS]